



CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD

# NEWS Release

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## **Guardsmen secured, safe from second storm**

**BELLE CHASSE NAVAL AIR STATION, LA.** – Even with Hurricane Rita threatening Louisiana, Joint Task Force California was not deterred from its original mission to the Bayou State for Hurricane Katrina.

Soldiers and airmen from the California National Guard remained in the New Orleans district despite Rita's presence, and drove on with the mission to support Louisiana after Katrina.

"We're fine," said Col. John B. Munoz-Atkinson, deputy commander, Joint Task Force California. "Everyone's on high ground; everyone's safe. We've positioned California Army National Guard soldiers in locations throughout Katrina where we'll respond quickly in the aftermath of Rita."

The latest storm, which lashed western Louisiana and parts of east Texas Saturday (Sept. 24), put California in secure mode. Joint Task Force California moved its operation center to Slidell, a city north of its former location at Belle Chasse Naval Air Station. Close to 50 soldiers and airmen waited out the storm from there. About 20 Guardsmen remained at Belle Chasse to continue operations from a temporary facility.

The 400-member 2/185<sup>th</sup> Armored Battalion moved out of Orleans Parish to Algiers, a city closer to California's former main headquarters in Belle Chasse. Battalion soldiers continued duties as facilities security, traffic control, and debris cleanup according to Maj. Frank Emanuel, battalion commander.

"We came here with a mission to help the people of Louisiana recover from Katrina. We're going to stick to that mission," Emanuel said. "And if our help is needed after Rita, we'll continue to provide support as best as we can."

"Every soldier is in a safe location, away from hurricane danger," said Capt. Bruce Gaffney, 2/185<sup>th</sup> Bravo Company commander. "They're all in hard structures: Buildings, churches, schools. They're safe from harm."